

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND  
WILDLIFE  
IN OPPOSITION TO  
L.D. 887  
“An Act To Prohibit Hunting Bear Using Dogs and Trapping Bear”**

**SPONSORED BY: Representative HARLOW of Portland.**

**DATE OF HEARING: May 12, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 887**.

**Title 12 §10051 states “The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is established to preserve, protect and enhance the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife resources of the State; to encourage the wise use of these resources; to ensure coordinated planning for the future use and preservation of these resources; and to provide for effective management of these resources.”**

L.D. 887 prohibits, with certain exceptions, hunting bear with dogs and trapping bears. This bill will eliminate or limit two important tools used by wildlife managers to maintain wildlife populations at biologically and socially acceptable levels. These tools allow the Department to adjust bear harvest regulations to ensure the conservation of Maine’s black bears and wise use of the resource, while reducing conflicts between people and bears.

Maine has the largest black bear population in the East, and one of the largest in the country. To prevent Maine’s bear population from growing, we need to harvest between 3,500 and 4,500 bears annually. Since 2005, our harvest has averaged 3,000 bears and our population grew from 23,000 to over 30,000 bears. Hunting with hounds and trapping accounts for approximately 15-20% of our annual harvest. Even with these methods we are not meeting our annual harvest objective. Eliminating any of our harvest management tools would greatly compromise our ability to manage the State’s bear population.

Black bear populations are increasing across their range and states throughout the east are looking for ways to increase hunting opportunity and bear harvest levels. For the first time in recent history, the entire State of Massachusetts is now open to black bear

hunting, including Suffolk County and the suburban areas around Boston. The State of Florida is looking to enact their first black bear hunt since 1994, the States of New Jersey and New York are both expanding the seasons and areas open to hunting black bears. Other states are considering adding new methods of harvest to what they currently allow. At times, appropriate wildlife management includes increasing hunting opportunity. This bill would reduce harvest and hamper the Department's ability to meet publically derived bear population objectives of stabilizing growth.

Our black bear population is well managed and our bears generally avoid people. We have relatively few conflicts and very few severe conflicts, but this could change if bears become more common, particularly in southern and coastal Maine. Other states have a very different experience with conflicts between bears and people; managing those interactions accounts for much of their bear program. In a recent workshop of the eastern black bear managers, one entire day of a three day program was dedicated to dealing with aggressive bears and another to responding to increasing conflicts.

This bill does allow the use of hounds and traps to manage nuisance animals, but not as a valid harvest method. The use of cable restraint devices and hounds can be challenging in more suburban settings where nuisance complaints typically occur. These tools are best used as part of regulated hunting seasons to prevent the bear population from moving into those suburban environments in the first place.

Bear management in Maine is based on sound science and publicly derived goals and objectives. Trapping and the use of dogs are important wildlife management tools that help maintain the Maine bear population at acceptable levels while limiting nuisance problems and contributing to public safety. The Department will continue to refine our bear management system to account for advances in population modeling, additional data we have gathered from our bear monitoring program, legislative mandates, and the public input we receive as part of our ongoing Species Management Process.

These same hunting methods were addressed in the 2004 referendum as well as the referendum this past fall and both times they were rejected by the people of Maine. From the Department's perspective the only things that have changed are: the bear population has continued to grow to an all-time high of over 30,000 animals, the science supporting bear management is even stronger and more compelling today, and the need for active management to control the bear population is more important than ever.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.